

Ice Breakers

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The Ice Breakers below were adapted from Dave's ESL Cafe web-site. For a more complete list visit eslcafe.com, go to "Stuff for Teachers" and click on Idea Cookbook/ Ice Breakers.

Description of 15 Ice Breakers

1 - M & M's to speak

Pass around a bowl of M & M's and let each student take only one - and ask them not to eat it. Then announce that if they took a red one they have to say something about their family, a yellow one and they have to tell us their hobbies, etc. I usually make each student speak for at least a minute. I use this breaker at the university level and it seems to be a hit. Created by Mike, Ulan Ude, Siberia

2 - My teacher isn't a Robot!

Write on the blackboard your name, surrounded by words that are answers to questions they should ask. Write obvious ones and difficult ones, for them in groups to think hard and feel the challenge. I usually do it like this: 25 The Black Cat Eternal Myriam Green Norway Angel Sara 39 Spaghetti Beautiful I

It seems easy, but can you guess everything? Well, I means I sister. Myriam is my sister's name. That's easy. But what's 39? t's my shoe size. Beautiful is my perfume, Green is a colour I hate. Created by Sara Martín, Spain

3 - It's your turn

This is a good vocabulary practice. You can use it at any level. Ask students to pass around a timer with set to beep in 10 seconds. Tell students they have to come up with 3 words in a given category if the timer beeps in their hand.

4 - Three things in common

This activity is for the first day of class with students who don't know each other. It requires no preparation. The students must ask each other questions until they find three things that they have in common. They must be things that are not obvious. For example, they can't say we both have black hair. It is easy to model the activity interviewing a student until you find three things that they have in common with you. Maybe choose a student you already know for this so you don't have to spend too long. Students can repeat this several times and then report back their findings to partners or the class. Created by David Reid, Hobart, Australia

5 - Meaningful Musical Chairs

A fun way for students to mingle and learn about each other the first day of class is to play this version of musical chairs. Arrange chairs in scattered pairs, semi-facing each other. Play some upbeat music. Instruct the students that they are to mingle around the room to the music. When the music stops they must find a chair. Beforehand a poster has been displayed listing by number 12 topics for introductory discussion ie. Home life, Jobs, Hobbies, Favorite person, Favorite food etc... Now, the teacher rolls the dice and whatever subject the number corresponds to dictates what topic each pair will discuss (they must introduce themselves to their partner before discussing). When the music begins again they know to get up and mingle waiting for the music to stop and the next round of discussion with someone new to begin.

6 - Bananas----a quickie!

Ok, this one is simple, but it results in tons of laughter. Basically, the teacher picks someone to be "it." The main goal of "It" is not to laugh or smile. Then the students in the class ask "It" questions, but "It" can only respond with the word "bananas." (They shouldn't be yes/no questions!!) For example: "What is your girlfriend's name?" Answer: BANANAS!

"What is your favorite sport?" -Bananas. Created Carie Mattison de Ordoñez, Oaxaca, MEXICO

7 - Hangless Hangman

Think up a word that applies to whatever lesson you have in mind. On the whiteboard, draw spaces corresponding to the letters, just as in the Hangman game. (For the word "game," for example, you'd draw: _ _ _ _.) Have the class guess at the letters...but instead of drawing a hanging man when they guess incorrectly, gradually draw a picture of what the mystery word describes. This will help them get it. Craig Chalquist, San Diego, CA

8 - Toilet Paper Fiasco

I got this game from a friend of mine, who played it at Summer Camp...and it worked out really well. I brought a roll of toilet paper to class, and pulled off a strand. Then, I told the students that each of them should take as much toilet paper as they use to go to the bathroom. This, of course, resulted in a whole lot of giggling, as girls asked "number one or number two?", and boys decided to be clever by taking ridiculous amounts of toilet paper. Anyway, when everyone was equipped, I told them all that they had to tell the class one thing about themselves (in the second language...for me, French) for every square of toilet paper that they had taken. Created by Stephanie, Ontario, Canada

9 - Facts and Lies

Hi everyone! This is a simple first-day icebreaker that I've found works really well with both small and large classes: The students think of three sentences, two are facts and one is a lie. One by one, students introduce themselves and say their three sentences. The rest of the class has to guess which one is a lie. It's best for the teacher to go first, not only to provide an example, but also to let the students know that the teacher is interested in interacting with them. Created by Nicole Gardner, Beijing, China.

10 - Alphabet Soup

This is a great activity for any age and gets people thinking quickly. It's a good exercise in vocabulary. Have participants/students divided by table or into small groups. Write the letters of the Alphabet on the board. Give students a topic and ask them to write a word for every letter of the alphabet. Time the activity. At the end of the time allotted, ask each team how far they got (to which letter), and then go through the alphabet asking each team what they had for each letter and to hold it up. The team that got the furthest, wins!

11 - Acting Adjectives

Call students to the front of the class, mostly at random. (You might want to use a more outgoing seeming student first) Show the student an adjective, and they have to act it out for the other students to guess the word. No speaking allowed by the student doing the acting. I mix together easy and difficult adjectives so the student talking doesn't know what kind he or she is going to get. Easy examples - fast, happy, cold, sleepy, short. Difficult examples - wet, rich, lazy, late, smart. I've used this with students aged 12 to mid-forties and it works quite well. The students relax and get a good laugh out of it. Created by Eric Clark, Bangkok, Thailand

12 - Fictional Language

Call out 2 students to the front of the class, pair them as you will. They should start a conversation in English about anything, when someone yells "Change!", they switch from English to a fictional language they invent as they speak... Sts yell "Change!" and the pair continues the conversation, this time in English... After 1-2 minutes, change pairs. As an intro for this activity, you could have students vocalizing random sounds in English! It's funny and students are bound to love it! Created by Sérgio, Curitiba, PR Brazil

13 - Lining up in Alphabetical Order

Here is a warm-up exercise to wake up a first or second class meeting. Have the students line up by alphabetically order. DON'T help them. DON'T organize it. Have the students ask each other their names and figure it out together. Then you check it. Write the names on the board. Round Two, line up by Last name, alphabetically. Then Check. Other variations. Line up by Birthday, Language, Distance from School, Size of family. Avoid obvious things like physical size, weight, hair color, etc... Created by Heinrich, NY USA

14 - Me Bag

Good for true beginners - I use this the first day of my German classes. Students learn some basic vocabulary for introductions, such as Hello, My name is, I come from, I like, I don't like, Thank you and Good-bye. Their assignment for the next class is to bring in a small paper bag with 3 items that represent them. They must be prepared to say hello to the class, introduce themselves & tell where they come from, and name the three things they like, then say thank you and good-bye. Variation: After saying the three things they like, they then describe what the item represents and tell the class a little about the item. For example, a student brings in a picture of their dog and tells the class about it in 2-3 sentences; or a baseball card and they explain that the Phillies are their favorite team; or a miniature soccer ball represents their favorite sport. For ESL students, this provides good practice.

15 - Say goodbye

Tell students to imagine that this is the last class period, and they should stand up and pretend that they are saying farewell. Help them with a few useful phrases such as "I'm going to miss you" or "Promise me you'll stay in touch." Then have them mingle and say goodbye to at least three people. 2. Then tell them to sit down and write the three things they liked the most about this term. After they're finished writing, you can ask students to volunteer what they wrote and make a list on the board. Created by Houston, Taiwan.